STORIES OF THE BIG LEAGUERS BY CHRISTY MATHEWSON.

The "Inside Game" as It Is Played—Tricks the Baseball Players Resort To—Doctoring the Field and Soaping the Ground Around the Pitcher's Box—Mishaps of Players at Critical Junctures.

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There is an old story about an altercation which took place during a wedding ceremony in the backwoods of the Virginia mountains. The discussion started over the propriety of the best man holding the ring, and by the time that it had been finally settled the bride gazed around on a dead bridegroom, dead father and a dead best man, not to mention three or four dead ushers and a clergyman.

"Them new fangled self-cockin' automatic guns has sure raised hell with my prospects," she sighed.

That's the way I felt when John Franklin Baker last October popped that home run into the right field stand in the ninth inning of the third game of the world's series with one man already out. For eight and one-third innings the Giants had played "inside" ball, and I had carefully nursed along every batter who came to the plate, studying his weakness and pitching at it. It looked as if we were going to win the game and then zing!

The ball went into the stand on a line and I looked around at my fielders, who had had the game almost within their grasp a minute before. Instantly I realized that I had been pitching myself out, expecting the end to come in nine innings. My arm felt like so much lead hanging to my side after that hit. I wanted to go and get some crape and hang it on my salary whip. Then that old story about the wedding popped into my head, and I said to myself:

"He has sure raised hell with your prospects."

Sam Strang, the official pinch hitter of the Giants a few seasons ago, was one of the best in the business. McGraw sent him to the bat in the ninth inning of a game the Giants were playing in Brooklyn. We were two runs behind and two were already out, with one runner on the bases, and he was only as far as second. Doc Scanlon was pitching for Brooklyn, and evidently intimidated by Sam's pinch hitting reputation or something, suddenly became wild and gave the Giant batter three balls. With the count three and nothing, McGraw shouted from the bench:

"Wait it out, Sam!"

But Sam didn't hear him, and he took a nice masculine, virile, full armed swing at the ball and fouled it out of the reach of all the local guardians of the soil.

"Are you deaf?" barked McGraw. "Wait it out, I tell you."

As a matter of fact, Strang was a little deaf and did not hear the shouted instructions the second time. But Doc Scanlon was sensitive as to hearing, and feeling sure Strang would obey the orders of McGraw, thought he would be taking no chances in putting the next ball over the centre of the plate. It came up the groove and Strang admired it as it approached. Then he took his swing, and the next place that the ball touched was in the Italian district, just over the right field fence. The hit tied the score.

McGraw met Strang at the plate and instead of greeting him with shouts of approbation exclaimed:

"I ought to fine you $25 and would except for those two runs and the few points difference the game will make in the percentage. Come on now, boys. Let's win this one." And we did in the eleventh inning.

"Inside" Game Failed.

That was a case of the "inside" game failing. Any big league pitcher with brains would have laid the ball over after hearing McGraw shout earnest and direct orders at the batter to "wait it out." Scanlon was playing the game, and Strang was not, but it broke for Sam. It was the first time in his life that he ever hit the ball over the right field fence in Brooklyn, and he has never done it since. If he hadn't been lucky in connecting with that ball and lifting it where it did the most good, his pay envelope would have been lighter by $25 at the end of the month and he would have obtained an accurate idea of McGraw's opinion of his intellectuality.

In the clubhouse after the victory McGraw said:

"Honest, Sam, why did you swing at that ball after I had told you not to?"

"I didn't hear you," replied Strang.

"Well, it's lucky you hit it where they weren't, answered McGraw, "because if any fielder had connected with the ball there would have been a rough greeting waiting for you on the bench. And as a tip, Sam, direct from me: You got away with it once, but don't try it again. It was bad baseball."

"But that straight one looked awful good to me coming up the 'groove,'" argued Sam.

"Don't fall for all the good lookers, Sam," suggested McGraw, the philosopher.

Strang is now abroad having his voice cultivated, and he intends to enter the grand opera field as soon as he can finish the spring training in Paris and get his throat into shape for the big league music circuit. But I will give any orchestra leader who faces Sam a tip. If he doesn't want him to come in strong where the music is marked "rest," don't put one in the "groove," because Strang just naturally can't help swinging at it. He is a poor waiter.

The Boston club lost eighteen straight games in the season of 1910, and as the team was leaving the Polo Grounds after having dropped four in a row, making the eighteenth, I said to Tenney:

"How does it seem, Fred, to be on a club that has lost eighteen straight?"

"It's what Gen. Sherman said war is," replied Tenney, who seldom swears. "But for all around entertainment I would like to see John McGraw on a team which had dropped fifteen or sixteen in a row."

As if Tenney had put the curse on us, the Giants hit a losing streak the next day that totalled six games straight. Everything that we tried broke against us. McGraw would attempt the double steal, and both throws would be accurate, and the runner caught at the plate. A hit and run sign would be given, and the batter would run up against a pitchout.

McGraw was slowly going crazy. All his pet "inside" tricks were worthless. He, the king of baseball clairvoyants, couldn't guess right. It began to look to me as if Tenney would get his entertainment. After the sixth one had gone against us and McGraw had not spoken a friendly word to any one for a week, he called all the players around him in the clubhouse.

"I ought to let you all out and get a gang of high school boys in here to defend the civic honor of this great and growing city whose municipal pride rests on your shoulders," he said. "But I'm not going to do it. Hereafter we will cut out all 'inside' stuff and play straight baseball. Every man will go up there and hit the ball just like you see it done on the lots."

Into this oration was mixed a judicious amount of sulphur. The Cubs had just taken the first three of a four game series from us without any trouble at all. The next day we went out and resorted to the wallop, plain, untrimmed slugging tactics, and beat Chicago 17 to 1. Later we returned to the hand raised, cultivated hothouse form of baseball, but for a week we played the old fashioned game with a great deal of success. It changed our luck.

Fixing the Grounds.

Another method which has upset the "inside" game of many visiting teams is "doping" the grounds.

The first time in my baseball career that I ever encountered this was in Brooklyn when Hanlon was the manager. Every time he thought I was going to pitch there he would have the diamond doctored for me in the morning. The ground keeper sank the pitcher's box down so that it was below the level of all the bases instead of slightly elevated, as it should be.

Hanlon knew that I used a lot of speed when I first broke into the league, getting some of it from my elevation on the diamond. He had a team of fast men who depended largely on a bunting game and their speed in getting to first base to win. With me fielding bunts out of the hollow they had a better chance of making their goal. Then pitching from the lower level would naturally result in the batters getting low balls because I would be more apt to misjudge the elevation of the plate. Low ones were made to bunt. Finally, Hanlon always put into the box to work against me a little pitcher who was not affected as much as I by the topographical changes.

"Why," I said to George Davis, the Giants' manager, the first time I pitched out of the cellar which in Brooklyn was regarded as the pitcher's box, "I'm throwing from a hollow instead of off a mound."

"Sure," replied Davis. "They 'doped' the grounds for you. But never mind. When we are entertaining, the box at the Polo Grounds will be built up the days you are going to pitch against Brooklyn, and you can burn them over and at their heads if you like."

The thing that worried the Athletics most before the last world's series was the reputation of the Giants as base stealers. When we went to Philadelphia for the first game I was surprised at the heavy condition of the base lines.

"Did it rain here last night?" I inquired from a native.

"No," he answered.

Then I knew that the lines had been wet down to slow up our fast runners and make it harder for them to steal. As things developed, this precaution was unnecessary, but it was an effort to break up what was known to be our strongest "inside" play.

Baseball men maintain that the acme of doctoring grounds was the work of the old Baltimore Orioles. The team was composed of fast men who were brilliant bunters and hard base runners. The soil of the infield was mixed with a form of clay which when wet and then rolled was almost as hard as concrete. The ground outside the first and third base lines was built up slightly to keep well placed bunts from rolling foul, while toward first base there was a distinct down grade to aid the runner in reaching that station with all possible expedition.

Toward second there was a gentle slow, and it was down hill to third. But coming home from third was uphill work. A player had to be a mountain climber to make it. This all benefited fast men like Keeler, McGraw, Kelley and Jennings, whose most dangerous form of attack was the bunt.

Less Doctoring Nowadays.

The Orioles did not stop at doctoring the infield. The grass in the outfield was permitted to grow long and centre and left fields were kept level, but in right field there was a sharp down grade to aid the fast Keeler. He had made an exhaustive study of all the possible angles at which the ball might bound and had certain paths that he followed but which were not marked out by signposts for visiting right fielders. He was sure death on hits to his territory, while usually wallops got past visiting right fielders. And so great was the grade that Wee Willie was barely visible from the batter's box. A hitting team coming to Baltimore would be forced to fall in.o the bunting game or be entirely outclassed. And the Orioles did not furnish their guests with topographical maps of the grounds.

The habit of doctoring grounds is not so much in vogue now as it once was. For a long time it was considered fair to arrange the home field to the best advantage of the team which owned it, for otherwise what was the use in being home? It was on the same principle that a general builds his breastworks to suit the fighting style of his army, for they are his breastworks.

But lately among the profession sentiment and baseball legislation have prevailed against the doctoring of grounds, and it is done very little. Occasionally a pitching box is raised or lowered to meet the requirements of a certain man, but they are not altered every day to fit the pitcher as they once were. Such tactics often hopelessly upset the plan of battle of the visiting club unless this exactly coincides with the habits of the home team. Many strategic plans have been wasted on carefully arranged grounds and many "inside" plays have gone by the board when the field was fixed so that a bunt was bound to roll foul if the ball followed the laws of gravitation, as it usually does, because the visiting team was known to have the bunting habit.

A good story of doctored grounds gone wrong is told of the Philadelphia Athletics. The eccentric Rube Waddell had bundles of speed in his early days and from a slightly elevated pitcher's box the batter could scarcely tell Rube's delivery from that of a cannon. He was scheduled to pitch one day and showed around at morning practice looking unusually fit for George.

"How are you feeling to-day, George?" asked Connie Mack, his boss.

"Never better," replied the lighthearted "Rube."

"Well, you work this afternoon."

"All right," answered Waddell.

Then the groundkeeper got busy and built the pitcher's box up about two feet so that Waddell would have a splendid opportunity to cut loose all his speed. At that time he happened to be the only tall man on the pitching staff of the Philadelphia club, and as a rule the box was kept very low. The scheme would probably have worked out as planned if it had not been that Waddell in the course of his noonday wanderings met several friends in whose society he became so deeply absorbed that he neglected to report at the ball park at all. He also forgot to send word, and here was the pitcher's box standing up out of the infield like one of the peaks of the Alps.

Soap for the Pitcher.

As the players gathered, and Waddell failed to show up, the manager nervously looked at his watch. At last he sent out scouts to the "Rube's" known haunts, but no trace of the temperamental artist could be found. The visitors were already on the field and it was too late to lower the box. A short pitcher had to work in the game from this peak of progress, while the opposing team installed a skyscraper on the mound. The Philadelphia club was badly beaten and Waddell was heavily fined for his carelessness in disrupting the "inside" play of his team.

An old and favorite trick used to be to soap the soil around the pitcher's box so that when a man was searching for some place to dry his perspiring hands and grabbed up this soaped earth it made his palm slippery and he was unable to control the ball.

Of course the home talent knew where the good ground lay and used it, or else carried some unadulterated earth in their trousers pockets as a sort of private stock. But our old friend Bugs Raymond hit on a scheme to spoil this idea and make the trick useless. Arthur always perspired profusely when he pitched, and several managers perceiving this had made it a habit to soap the dirt liberally whenever it was his turn to work. While he was pitching for St. Louis he went into the box against the Pirates one day in Pittsburg. His handsi were naturally slippery, and several times he had complained that he could not dry them in the dirt, especially in Pittsburg soil.

As Raymond worked in the game in question he was noticed particularly by the Pittsburg batters and spectators to get better as he went along. Frequently his hand slipped into his back pocket, and then his control was wonderful. Sometimes he would reach down and apparently pick up a handful of earth, but it did no damage. After the game he walked over to Fred Clarke, and reached into his back pocket. His face broke into a grin.

"Ever see any of that stuff, Fred?" he asked innocently, showing the Pittsburgh manager a handfol of a dark brown substance. "That's rosin. It's great—lot's better than soaped ground. Wish you'd keep a supply out there in the box for me when I'm going to work instead of that slippery stuff you've got out there now. Will you, as a favor to me?"

Making the Ball Darker.

Thereafter all the pitchers got to carrying rosin or pumice stone in their pockets, for the story quickly went round the circuit, and it is useless to soap the soil in the box any more. There are many tricks by which the grounds or ball are "fixed," but for nearly all an antidote has been discovered, and these questionable forms of the "inside" game have failed so often that they have largely been abandoned.

One big league manager used always to give his men licorice or some other dark and adhesive and juicy substance to chew on a dingy day. The purpose was to dirty the ball so that it was harder for the batters to see when the pitcher used his fast one. As soon as a new ball was thrown into the game it was quickly passed around among the fielders, and instead of being the lily white thing that left the umpire's hands when it finally got to the pitcher's box it was a very pronounced brunette. But some eagle eyed arbiter detected this and kept pouring new balls into the game when the non-licorice chewers were at the bat, while he saved the discolored ones for the consumption of the masticators. It was another trick that failed.

Frequently backgrounds are tampered with if the home club is notably weak at the bat. The best background for a batter is a dull, solid green. Many clubs have painted backgrounds in several contrasting, broken colors so that the sunlight, shining off them, blinds the batter. The Chicago White Sox are said to have done this and for many years the figures showed that the batting of both the Chicago players and the visitors at their park was very light. The White Sox's hitting was weak anywhere, so that the poor background was an advantage to them.

Injuries have often upset the "inside" play of a club. Usually a team's style revolves around one or two men, and the taking of them out of the game destroys the whole machine. The substitute does not think as quickly, neither does he see and grasp the opportunities as readily. This was true of the Cubs last season. Chance and Evers used to be the "inside" game of the Cubs. Evers was out of the game most of the summer and Chance was struck in the head with a pitched ball and had to quit. The playing of the Chicago team fell off greatly as a result.

Chance is the sort of athlete who is likely to get injured. When he was a catcher he was always banged up because he never got out of the way of anything. He is that kind of player. If he has to choose between accepting a pair of spikes in a vital part of his anatomy and getting a putout or dodging the spikes and losing the putout, he always takes the putout and usually the spikes. He never dodges away from a ball when at the bat that may possibly break over the plate and cost him a strike. That is why he was hit in the head. He lingered too long to ascertain whether the ball was going to curve and found out that t wasn't, which put him out of the game, the Cubs practically out of the pennant race and broke up their "inside" play.

Unlucky for Bresnahan.

Roger Bresnahan is the same kind of a man. He thinks quickly and is a brilliant player, but he never dodges anything. He is often hurt as a result. Once, when he was with the Giants, he was hit in the face with a pitched ball, and McGraw worried while he was laid up, for fear that it would make him bat shy. After he came back, he was just as friendly with the plate as ever. The injury of men like Chance and Bresnahan, whose services are of such vital importance to the "inside" play of a team, destroys the effectiveness of the club.

Once, in 1908, when we were fighting the Cubs for the pennant at every step, McGraw planned a bunting game against Overall, who is big and not very fast in covering the little rollers. Bresnahan and O'Day had been having a serial argument through two games, and Roger, whose nerves were worn to a frazzle, like those of the rest of us at that time, thought Hank had been shading his judgment slightly toward the Cubs. In another story I have pointed out that O'Day, the umpire, was stubborn and that nothing could be gained by continually picking on him. When the batteries were announced for that game McGraw said as the team went to the field:

"We can beat this guy Overall by bunting."

Bresnahan went out to put on his chest protector and shin guards. O'Day happened to be adjusting his makeup near him. Roger couldn't resist the temptation.

"Why don't you put on a Chicago uniform, Hank, instead of those duds?" he asked. "Is it true, if the Cubs win the pennant, they've promised to elect you an alderman in Chicago?"

"Get out of the game and off the field," said O'Day.

Bresnahan had to obey the injunction, and Needham, the only other available catcher, went behind the bat. Tom Needham never beat out a bunt in his life, and he destroyed all McGraw's plans because, with him in the game instead of Bresnahan, the style had to be switched. We lost. Bresnahan, a fast man and a good bunter, batted third and would have been valuable in the attack best adapted to beat Overall. But his sudden demise and the enforced substitution of the plodding Needham ruined the whole plan of campaign. Therefore frequently umpires upset a team's "inside" game.

One of McGraw's schemes back fired on him when Luderus, the hard hitting Philadelphia first baseman, broke into the league. Some one had tipped Mac off, and tipped him wrong, that this youngster could be disconcerted in a pinch by the catcher discussing signs and whatnot with him, thus distracting his attention.

"Chief," said McGraw before the game, "if this Luderus gets up in a tight place, slip him a little talk."

The situation came, and Meyers obeyed instructions. The game was in Philadelphia, and three men were on the bases with two out. Ames was pitching.

"What are you bringing the bat up with you for?" asked the Chief as Luderus arranged himself at the plate.

No answer.

Then Meyers gave Ames his sign. Next he fixed his fingers in a fake signal and addressed the young batter.

"The best hitters steal signs," said the Chief. "Just look down in my glove and see the signals."

But Luderus was not caught and kept his eyes glued on Ames. He hit the next ball over the right field wall and won the game. As he crossed the plate he said to the Chief:

"It's too easy. I don't need your signs. They pulled that one on me in the bushes long ago."

"After this, when that fellow bats," said McGraw to Meyers later, "do as exact an imitation of the sphinx as you know how. The tip was no good."

Talking to the Hitter.

The trick of talking to the hitter is an old one. The idea is for the catcher to give a wrong sign for his benefit, after having flashed the right one, induce the batter, usually the youngster, to look down at it, and then have the pitcher shoot one over the plate while he is staring in the glove.

Steve Evans, the St. Louis right fielder, tells the story of a fan who sat in the same box at the Cardinals' park every day and devoted most of his time to roasting him, S. Evans. His favorite expressions in connection with Evans were "bone head," "wooden head," and so on. He loudly claimed that Steve had no knowledge of the game and spoiled every play that Bresnahan tried to put through.

One day, when the Giants were playing in St. Louis, some one knocked up a high foul which landed in this orator's box. He saw it coming, tried to dodge, used poor judgment, and, realizing that the ball was going to strike him, snatched his hat off, and took it full on an immodestly bald head. Steve Evans was waiting to go to the bat, and exclaimed in a voice that could not have been heard more than two miles away:

"That's the 'gink' who has been calling me a 'bone head.'"

Steve got a great laugh from the crowd, but right there the St. Louis club lost a patron, for the bald headed one has never been seen at the grounds since, according to Evans, and his obituary has not been printed yet, either.

Al Bridwell, formerly the Giants' shortstop, was one of the cleverest men at the "inside" game that ever broke into the big leagues, and it was this that made him valuable. Then suddenly his legs went bad, and he slowed up. It was his speed and his ability to bunt and his tireless waiting at the plate to make all toilers in the box pitch all they had that had made him a great player.

He seldom swung at a bad ball. As soon as he slowed up McGraw knew he would have to go if the Giants were to win the pennant. He deeply regretted letting the gritty little shortstop, whose legs had grown stiff in his service, leave the club, but sentiment never won any pennants.

"Al," he said to Bridwell, "I'm going to let you go to Boston. Your legs will be all right eventually, but I've got to have a fast man now while you are getting back your old speed."

"That's all right, Mac, replied Bridwell. "It's all part of the game."

He did not rave and swear that he had been double crossed, as many players do under the same circumstances. I never heard Bridwell swear, and I never found any one else who did. He had been playing for weeks, when every time he moved it pained him, because he thought he might have a share of the money that winning a pennant would mean. It was a staggering blow to him, this sending him from a pennant possibility to a hopeless tailender, but he took it gamely.

"I guess I was 'gumming' the inside stuff," he said.

And he did get some of the prize money. The boys voted him a share.

Does Not Always Work.

It will be seen that the "inside" game sometimes fails. Many a time I have passed a catcher or good batter to take a chance on a pitcher, and then have had him make a hit just when hits were not at all welcome. I walked a catcher once and had the pitcher shove the ball over first base for a single when he closed his eyes and dodged back in an effort to get his head out of the line he thought it was pursuing before it curved. In ducking he got his bat in front of the ball, a result he had never obtained with his eyes open.

Once I started to pass Hans Wagner in a pinch to take a chance on the next batter and was a little careless in throwing the ball too close to the plate. He reached out and slapped it for a single. Again the "inside" game had failed.

Speaking pretty generally, most managers prefer to use this "inside" game, though, and there are few vacancies in the big leagues right now for the man who is liable to steal second with the bases full.

The Wall Street edition of THE EVENING SUN contains all the financial news and the stock and bond quotations to the close of the market. The closing quotations, including the "bid and asked" prices, with additional news matter, are contained also in the night and final editions of THE EVENING SUN.—Adv.